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Note: The names appearing in three of the four personal profiles in this report have been changed to protect the privacy of the people featured.



“There is a huge under-recognition of abuse of seniors in Canada. I would say this field is 20 years behind where we were when we were trying to raise awareness about violence against women and, before that, how to prevent and respond to abuse of children.”

Alison Leaney, Chair, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

Introduction

Doris, who is 87 and confined to a wheelchair, lives with her divorced son and depends on him for her ongoing care. That’s why she’s afraid to complain about the way he’s been treating her lately. Over the past year, her son Eric has become increasingly short-tempered and verbally abusive. Not only that, he’s insisted Doris grant him power of attorney and now she suspects he’s been using her money to pay for his lavish dinners out with friends and other perks he can’t usually afford. When she questions him or tries to have a discussion, he accuses her of imagining things, calls her names and threatens to put her into a nursing home. Doris is worried her money’s going to run out. She’s also ashamed and deeply saddened to think her own flesh and blood could be so heartless and hurtful. But for now, she chooses to suffer in silence.

Unfortunately, Doris’s story is more common than many people realize. In fact, it’s estimated that between 4 and 10 per cent of Ontario seniors experience some type of abuse. And the estimates are no different for Perth County; in fact, if anything, the problem takes on even greater significance here since Perth has the highest per-capita ratio of seniors in the province.

The trouble is, like elsewhere in the country only a small number of elder abuse incidents are reported to local agencies and authorities. Clearly, the majority of offences here go either undetected or unreported – or both.

That’s because victims, like Doris, are often ashamed, dependent on their abusers for care, afraid of retaliation, abandonment or being institutionalized. Sometimes it’s because they don’t know who or where to turn to for help. More often, they’re simply unwilling or unable to report the abuse.

“We don’t see too many elder abuse cases, but I don’t think that’s because it’s not happening. It’s because the victims are not coming forward. These people came from a generation that told themselves ‘this is just the way it is’ and they’re very reluctant to share what they see as their personal business.”

Michele Thompson, Manager, Victim/Witness Assistance Program



A hidden crime

Elder abuse is often referred to as ‘the hidden crime.’ It can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, mental abuse and neglect.

Stratford Police Services, Perth County OPP, and local organizations that work within the justice system or support the elderly in one way or another, are all aware of the problem of elder abuse. They are also aware of the many challenges in detecting and combating it.

Yet there’s no better time than now to tackle the issue because seniors are by far the fastest growing segment of the population. Statistics Canada predicts that by 2026 seniors, aged 65 and older, who now account for 13% of the Canadian population, will grow to 21%.

The Perth County Social Research & Planning Council commissioned this report because its members believe elder abuse is an important local issue that warrants investigation. The Council also believes it’s an issue that requires a planned course of action, which is why the report includes recommendations on how best to tackle the problem.

“Although there is no systematic collection of statistics or prevalent studies in the developing world, crime records, journalistic reports, social welfare records and small scale studies contain evidence that abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of elders are much more common than societies admit.”

World Health Organization, Missing Voices: Views of Elder Persons on Elder Abuse

Fast facts:

- Among seniors who’ve been physically abused, 68% report the assault was committed by a family member (Source: Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration)
- 96% of Canadians think most of the abuse experienced by older adults is hidden or goes undetected (Source: Environics poll for Human Resources and Social Development Canada)
- Female seniors (38%) are more likely to be abused than male seniors (18%). (Source: Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration)



What is Elder Abuse?

“Elder abuse is an issue that may affect seniors in all walks of life. However, some seniors may be at greater risk of experiencing some type of abuse: those who are older, female, isolated, dependent on others, cared for by someone with an addiction, seniors living in institutional settings, and those who are frail, who have a cognitive impairment or a physical disability.”

Report of the National Seniors Council on Elder Abuse, November 2007

The World Health Organization defines elder abuse as “single or repeated acts, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.”

In most cases, the person being abused knows and trusts the abuser and relies on him/her in some way, which makes it even worse. It might be a child, another family member, friend, a paid caregiver, even a spouse.

Unfortunately, seniors can make easy targets. Many live alone and are socially isolated, which increases their vulnerability. Others are dependent on their abuser for care. Some suffer from dementia or other health issues that may prevent them from responding to the abuse or reporting it. Some may feel it's impossible to get away from the abuser if the relationship has been long standing. And many seniors are simply not as physically strong as they once were so are unable to defend themselves.



“A lot of elder abuse victims are isolated; they’re not part of a social network. They don’t belong to any groups or even a coffee club. They’re more reclusive and therefore less informed because of it.”

Constable Rob Viani, Community Service Officer, Stratford Police Services

Fast Facts:

- 22% of Canadians think a senior they know personally might be experiencing some form of abuse. (Source: Seniors Canada)
- 24% of all abusers are unrelated caregivers; so abuse is happening in long-term care/assisted living facilities. (Source: Statistics Canada)
- More than 90% of Canadians believe raising awareness among seniors about their right to live safely and securely is the most important issue for governments in addressing elder abuse. (Source: Seniors Canada.)



Elder abuse can take many forms

The Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (ONPEA) uses the following descriptions:

Financial Abuse is the most common form of elder abuse. It often refers to the theft or misuse of money or property such as household goods, clothes or jewelry. It also includes forcing the sale of property or possessions, misusing power of attorney responsibilities, coercing changes in a will, withholding funds and/or fraud.

Physical Abuse is any physical pain or injury that's willfully inflicted upon a senior. It includes unreasonable confinement or punishment resulting in physical harm, as well as hitting, slapping, pinching, pushing, burning, pulling hair, shaking, physical restraint, physical coercion, forced feeding or withholding physical necessities.

Sexual Abuse is any sexual activity that occurs when one or both parties cannot or do not give consent. It includes, but is not limited to, assault, rape, sexual harassment, intercourse, fondling, intimate touching during bathing, exposing oneself, and inappropriate sexual comments.

Psychological (Emotional) Abuse is the willful infliction of mental anguish or the provocation of fear of violence or isolation. This kind of abuse diminishes the identity, dignity and self-worth of the senior. It can include name-calling, yelling, ignoring the person, scolding or shouting, insults, threats, intimidation or humiliation, treating as a child, emotional deprivation, isolation, and the removal of decision-making power.

Neglect can be intentional or unintentional. It happens when the caregiver of a dependent senior fails to meet his/her needs. Forms of neglect include not providing adequate food, housing, medicine, clothing or physical aids, as well as inadequate hygiene, supervision and safety precautions. It also includes withholding medical services and medications, overmedicating, allowing a senior to live in unsanitary or poorly heated conditions, and denying access to necessary services, such as homemaking, nursing, and social work. For a variety of reasons, seniors themselves may fail to provide adequate care for their own needs, and this is known as self-neglect.

“Older women who’ve been abused have been socialized to believe this is not something they’re supposed to talk about. This is a historical problem and their mothers and grandmothers, who may also have suffered abuse, probably didn’t talk about it either. To go specifically to an agency that serves abused women is very difficult for them and there’s a stigma attached to it. We need to be able to reach these women wherever they are – and we need to let them know it’s okay to talk about and it’s okay to get some help.”

Lisa Wilde, Executive Director, Emily Murphy Centre



Recognizing the signs of elder abuse

Sometimes it can be difficult to determine if an elder is actually being abused since there may be other explanations for the signs, such as a fall, self-neglect or poor personal choices. Other times it's more obvious abuse is going on. One thing experts agree on is the longer the abuse goes on, the worse it tends to get.

The following are possible signs an elder is being abused:

Financial Abuse/fraud:

- Significant withdrawals from the elder's accounts
- Sudden changes in the elder's financial condition
- Items or cash missing from the senior's household
- Suspicious changes in wills, power of attorney
- Unpaid bills, even when the elder has enough money to pay
- Financial activity the senior couldn't have done, such as an ATM withdrawal when the account holder is bedridden
- Unnecessary services, goods, or subscriptions
- Paying far more for work/service than others would be charged
- Large advance payments with nothing to show for it

“There's a whole silence and a whole shame around elder abuse – whether you're living it now or you lived it in the past. You just want to get on with getting on.”

Anne McDonnell, Executive Director, Optimism Place

Physical Abuse:

- Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts, or scars, especially if they appear symmetrically on two sides of the body
- Broken bones, sprains, or dislocations
- Reports of drug overdose or apparent failure to take medication regularly (a prescription has more remaining than it should have)
- Broken eyeglasses or frames
- Signs of being restrained, such as rope marks on wrists
- Caregiver's refusal to allow you to see the elder alone

Sexual Abuse:

- Bruises around breasts or genitals
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing

Psychological/Emotional Abuse:

- Threatening, belittling, or controlling caregiver behavior witnessed by others
- Behavior from the elder that mimics dementia, such as rocking, sucking, or mumbling to oneself



“We can become involved in an investigation without charges being laid. Often the victim doesn’t want charges to be laid; they just want the abuse to stop. The trouble is, sometimes without police intervention it won’t stop. Police intervention, even when charges are not laid, can have a big impact.”

Detective Constable Debra Aitken, Perth County OPP

Neglect: (By caregivers and/or self)

- Unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration
- Untreated physical problems, such as bed sores
- Unsanitary living conditions: dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes
- Being left dirty or unbathed
- Unsuitable clothing for the weather
- Unsafe living conditions (no heat or running water; faulty electrical wiring, other fire hazards)
- Desertion of the elder at a public place

“That’s when I felt I was the stupidest creature ever born. What was I thinking?”

Perth County senior and the victim of fraud, who advanced \$3,000 to a fly by night work crew for porch repairs which were done sloppily, incompletely – and dishonestly. From the video ‘Elder Abuse,’ commissioned by the Perth County Elder Abuse Committee and produced by Stratford Central Secondary School students.

“These people grew up in a time when you didn’t lock your house. People could knock on the door and ask to use your phone and you’d let them. These are different times now.”

Detective Rick Johnson, Stratford Police Services

Albert, a Perth County widower in his senior years, was flattered when a woman 30 years his junior began showing him affection. One thing led to another and before long she moved in with him. The arrangement was she would perform sexual favours and in return Albert would support her and provide spending money. Everywhere they went, the woman pretended to be his wife. It didn’t take long, however, for Albert’s money to be drained from his bank account. Police eventually became involved and discovered the woman had a criminal record for similar offences. She was subsequently charged with fraud and sentenced to time in jail.



Elder Abuse in Perth County

“We all know it’s out there much more than it’s reported.”

Cheryl Legate, Executive Director, Victim Services of Perth County

Maggie is an elderly Perth County woman suffering from dementia. She lives with her daughter Kate, who is supposed to be her caregiver. The trouble is, Kate has a full-time job, which means she has to be away from the house and her mother for prolonged periods of time. Local authorities were recently contacted when it came to light that Maggie was not only forcing her mother to take sedatives she didn’t want to take, but was also tying her to a chair while she went to work, reasoning it at least kept her mother safe while she was gone. The elderly woman has since been moved into a retirement home and charges have been laid against the daughter.

“For so many to live to be old is one of the most remarkable achievements of the 20th century. To be old and live in dignity, free from all forms of abuse and violence, must be a common goal for all societies of the 21st century. It all starts with respect, as in the words of one of the older respondents: ‘Respect is better than food or drink’.”

World Health Organization, Missing Voices: Views of Older Persons on Elder Abuse

Reported incidents of elder abuse in Perth County are few and far between. It’s not that elder abuse isn’t happening here, because it is. Local agencies and authorities attribute the low rate of reporting to the fact that the crime still remains largely hidden. One reason is the reluctance or inability of the victims to report the abuse. Another reason is the difficulty in detecting – and proving – the abuse.

The level of staff training in elder abuse awareness varies widely among local organizations and facilities, so the abilities of those working with the elderly to prevent and detect signs of elder abuse also varies widely accordingly.

For example, all long-term care homes, which are licensed, regulated and funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, are mandated to provide non-abuse training for all staff, including housekeeping, dieticians and personal care workers. Retirement homes, which are not funded by the Ministry and therefore not mandated to provide training, can determine their own training requirements.



The Bill of Rights for People Living in Ontario Long-Term Care Homes was published in September 2008 by the Advocacy Centre for the Elder and Community Legal Education Ontario. It outlines 19 fundamental rights for long-term care residents and most long-term care facilities post these rights so staff, residents and family members are all aware of them. Knowing these rights is especially important given the increasing number of media reports about elder abuse in institutions.

The challenges in detecting and preventing elder abuse in long-term care facilities and retirement homes are compounded by the number of people providing care, the often high ratio of residents to workers, the various cognitive and physical impairments of residents, and by the demands and expectations of family members. Enhanced non-abuse training and increased staffing levels are critical to minimizing the chances of elder abuse occurring.

“We work in a challenging environment where people rely on us and where many personalities come into play. As staff, we need strategies to cope so we know how to de-escalate a challenging situation. After all, we’re people as well.”

Sylvie Lucas, Executive Director, Hillside Manor (long-term care home)

Most of the cases of elder abuse that are reported to police in Perth County tend to involve fraud, the most common form of elder abuse.

Stratford Police Services, Perth County OPP, and local service providers all report very few cases of elder abuse locally. None of the local organizations have formal tracking methods in place, nor do they keep statistics on elder abuse incidents, yet the services they provide can and occasionally do encounter incidents of elder abuse. Stratford Police, however, are currently in the process of introducing a new records management system, which will assign codes to the different elder abuse offences, enabling them to be tracked and quantified.

“Even though we have no official tracking mechanisms at the moment, I can tell you we’re not seeing elder abuse at a rate anywhere near four to 10 per cent. We deal with it far less than that because it’s hidden or it’s unobserved. There are so many variables at play.”

Anita Cole, Regional Client Services Manager for South West CCAC



Addressing the growing concern over elder abuse

Authorities and agencies in Perth County are becoming increasingly aware of elder abuse – a development that’s unfolding in tandem with provincial and national efforts to strategically address the problem.

On June 15, 2009 the Government of Canada launched a nation-wide elder abuse awareness campaign, including an advertising campaign dubbed Elder Abuse – It’s Time to Face the Reality. The 2008 federal budget also earmarked \$13 million over three years to help seniors and others recognize the signs and symptoms of elder abuse and to provide information on available supports.

On April 17, 2009, the Ontario Network for Prevention of Elder Abuse launched a province-wide toll-free hotline for at-risk seniors (1-866-299-1011), which is part of an elder abuse strategy funded by the provincial government at a cost of nearly \$900,000 a year.

Some jurisdictions have designated resources to deal exclusively with elder abuse. For example, the Waterloo Wellington Community Care Access Centre and the Waterloo Regional Police Service teamed up to form the Elder Abuse Response Team. A full-time nurse/case worker and a full-time detective are trained to respond to cases of elder abuse, while respecting confidentiality. They also coordinate information about community services, conduct criminal investigations and help other communities set up similar elder abuse programs.

Reflecting a local commitment to the issue, the Perth County Elder Abuse Committee, established in 2003 with members from local service providers, police and long-term care facilities, continues to lobby on behalf of vulnerable seniors, making education its top priority. The Seniors Services Network of Huron-Perth, which is an informal information-gathering and networking group with representatives from service providers and long-term care facilities, is also in a position to address elder abuse by sharing information with groups that have a vested interest in getting the word out and bringing the crime out into the open.

The Alzheimer’s Society Perth County continues to provide elder abuse education and support to caregivers since caregiver stress can sometimes be a factor in elder abuse.

“Our role in helping to prevent elder abuse is to provide education and support for the caregivers. They need to know they’re not alone and that there are other people who’ve been through similar things and have had the same kinds of experiences. Our caregiver support groups are growing all the time, which is a good sign since it shows people are reaching out for support.”

Debbie Deichert, Executive Director, Alzheimer Society, Perth County



Those working in rent-g geared-to-income housing are also attuned to the issue of elder abuse. There are 633 rent-g geared-to-income units in Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys, a waiting list of about 150 people, and a tenant list that is one-quarter seniors. Despite being stretched to the limit, staff must also be on the look-out for warning signs of possible elder abuse.

“If somebody starts paying a tenant’s rent or seems to be taking over the situation we do try and find out what their relationship is to the tenant. Do they have power of attorney, or is it a son or daughter who’s now helping out, or is it someone who’s imposing him or herself on the senior? We have to be vigilant about that possibility even though there’s no formal policy.”

Bill Tigert, Director of Social Services for Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys,

The limited availability of second-stage housing for abused senior women in Perth County is also cause for concern. Of the 20 apartments available at the Emily Murphy Centre, only three are suitable for single women.

If the growing awareness of elder abuse results in a growing number of abused seniors looking for alternative housing, the shortage of local options will quickly become even more critical.

Continuing local efforts to educate people about elder abuse, while identifying local shortages and needs, are precisely the kinds of approaches elder abuse experts believe work best in exposing and combating the problem.

“To address elder abuse, it is imperative that action take place at the community level and that resources be allocated to this. Participants delivered a unanimous message: that without adequate and sustainable funding, efforts to combat elder abuse in local communities are compromised.”

Report of the National Seniors Council on Elder Abuse, November 2007

Fast facts:

- The greater the impairment of a senior or the more severe the illness, the more likely it is that he/she will be abused. (Source: Canadian Mental Health Association)
- Male seniors (9%) are more likely to report financial or emotional abuse, compared to female seniors (5%). (Source: Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration)
- A study involving 31 nursing homes reported that 36% of nursing home staff had witnessed the physical abuse of an older adult and 81% had witnessed some form of psychological abuse. (Source: Canadian Mental Health Association)



Risk Factors for Elder Abuse

Some of the risk factors for elder abuse apply to the abuser, others the victim. Caregiver stress, for example, is a key factor in abuse in both the home and in institutional settings. That stress is intensified if the senior has mental health issues or physical care needs the caregiver is incapable of providing. Caring for a senior with multiple needs can be overwhelming and eventually lead to depression.

Even caregivers in institutions can experience stress levels that can lead to abuse. Excessive responsibilities, poor working conditions, long hours and inadequate training can all be contributing factors.

Sometimes family caregivers are poorly informed and lack the education and support required to properly care for an elder at home.

“When it comes to neglect, we see some families who aren’t providing appropriate care for their elderly loved ones, but it’s not necessarily because there’s any ill intent; sometimes it’s because they don’t know how to care for someone who’s sick, debilitated and has Alzheimer’s.”

Anita Cole, Regional Client Services Manger, South West CCAC

Other risk factors include a history of family violence. If there has been abusive behaviour within the family in the past, there’s a greater likelihood an elder will be abused at some point in the future.

There are also the personal problems and personalities of the abusers themselves. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, abusers are more likely to have mental health problems, substance abuse issues and/or financial problems.

Signs a caregiver may be abusing an elder include:

- being aggressive, insulting or threatening behaviour
- speaks for the elder and doesn’t allow him/her to make decisions
- reluctant to leave the elder alone with a professional.

Signs an elder may be the victim of abuse:

- Is anxious, withdrawn, agitated, evasive, depressed or suicidal.
- Shows fear of caregiver; behaviour changes when care giver enters/leaves room.
- Is frail or cognitively impaired and presenting for emergency treatment alone or without regular caregiver.
- Has low self-esteem.



Habits:

- Sudden/unexpected change in social habits.
- Sudden/unexpected change in residence or living arrangements.
- Unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills, account withdrawals, changes in his will or Power of Attorney, or disappearance of possessions.
- Refusal to spend money without consulting caregiver.
- Claims of being “accident-prone”.
- Missed/cancelled appointments, especially medical appointments.

“Sometimes I wonder why I’ve never come across a case of physical elder abuse, especially when you know the statistics. I think this really speaks to the fact that elder abuse is so hidden and it reminds us how vigilant we all need to be in looking for the signs.”

*Al Voort, Social Worker, Outpatient Mental Health Program,
Seniors Mental Health, Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance*

Health & Well-Being:

- Sudden/unexpected decline in health or cognitive ability.
- Poor/decline in personal hygiene; skin ulcers.
- Dehydration or malnutrition; sudden/rapid weight loss.
- Signs of over/under-medication.
- Suspicious injuries: bruising in various stages of healing; on the face or eye area, the inner part of the thighs or arms, or around the wrists or ankles.
- Sexually transmitted disease; itching, pain or bleeding in genital area; difficulty sitting or walking.
- Explanation of injury or condition: inappropriate to type/degree; vague or bizarre; conflicting information from elder and care giver.
- Unexplained delay in seeking treatment.
- Denial in view of obvious injury.
- Previous reports of similar injury.

Environment:

- Poor living conditions in comparison to assets.
- Inappropriate or inadequate clothing.
- Lack of food.
- Lack of required medical aids, functional aids, or medications.
- Evidence of locks or restraints.
- Living in worse conditions than others in the home.
- Involuntary separation from others in home, friends or other family members.



“Sometimes our role becomes helping the adult children realize their parent still has the ability to make his or her own choices and that they have that right. Just because someone is 80 doesn’t mean they can’t think clearly or make decisions.”

Sandie Mitchell, Social Worker, Family Counselling Program, Family Services Perth Huron

Fast Facts:

- 12% of Canadians have sought out information about a situation or suspected situation of elder abuse or about elder abuse in general. (Source: Environics poll for Human Resources and Social Development Canada.)
- There are almost 300,000 seniors living in institutions in Canada. (Source: Statistics Canada)
- Fewer than one in five situations of abuse actually come to the attention of any public agency, and fewer still come to the attention of a public agency operating in the criminal justice system. (Source: Canada’s Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity, Special Senate Committee on Aging, 2009)

Taking Action: What to do if elder abuse is suspected

After Norma, 87, suffered several strokes she was moved into a retirement home. It was clear to her supplemental caregiver that she wasn’t happy there, but they both decided to give it some time. It quickly became apparent, however, that Norma was being abused. Bruises appeared on her arms and while Norma had trouble speaking after the strokes, she indicated she’d also been hit in the stomach. Thinking it possible Norma was suffering from dementia, the caregiver nevertheless confronted the retirement home director about her concerns. Instead of investigating her concerns, the caregiver was given excuses and allegations Norma herself had lashed out at one of the workers. Unsatisfied, Norma’s caregiver planted a hidden camera in Norma’s room. Caught on tape was Norma being thrown into bed, screamed at, threatened with fists and a slipper. The film also showed workers helping themselves to Norma’s food and money from her wallet. Charges were subsequently laid against two of the home’s workers and Norma was moved to another facility. (True story from CTV’s W-Five documentary, Help Me: Elder Abuse in Canada)



While there are no specific community services in Perth County that deal exclusively with elder abuse, there are services that can help depending on the situation.

It's a job for police when a crime has been committed under the Criminal Code of Canada. These offences include assault, forcible confinement, sexual assault, extortion, fraud, forgery, theft, (including theft by a person with power of attorney), uttering threats, criminal harassment, criminal negligence and failure to provide the basic necessities of life. If in doubt, people are advised to call police, who will help determine what to do next.

There are no quick fixes or simple solutions in addressing the issue of elder abuse. The challenges in raising awareness, responding to elder abuse and ultimately mitigating and eliminating it are many, but the energy, commitment and expertise already exists among those who have taken on this task across the country.

Report of the National Seniors Council on Elder Abuse, November 2007

There is also a toll-free, confidential elder abuse hotline in Ontario that provides information, support and referrals to services 24 hours a day, seven days a week at **1-866-299-1011**. In emergency situations dialing 911 is the best option.

Even though there are no legal requirements to report suspected elder abuse of people living in their own private residences, anyone who witnesses harm being done to an elder in a long-term care facility is required by law to report it to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This can be done by calling the toll-free Action Line at **1-866-434-0144**.

“The field of prevention of abuse and neglect of older adults in Canada is lagging behind other areas of family violence prevention. It is largely the case that multiple small-scale projects and a few noteworthy larger programs exist in a patchwork of service delivery and under-coordinated effort. It is also far from being able to use practice standards that are available for other fields.”

Promising Approaches in the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults in Community Settings in Canada, 2007



The Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse suggests the following as the best steps to take for seniors who are being abused:

For seniors living in the community:

- Tell someone what's happening to you.
- Ask others for help if you need it.
- If someone is hurting or threatening you, or if it is not safe where you are, call police.
- Find out more from community resources about your options to take care of your financial security and personal needs.
- Call for counselling and support.
- Make a safety plan in case you have to leave quickly and contact Optimism Place, Victim Services or the Emily Murphy Centre for help developing a plan that's right for you.

You might also:

- Set aside an extra set of keys, I.D., glasses, bank card, money, address book, medication, and important papers. Keep this outside of your home.
- Find a safe place with friends and family so you have a place to go to in an emergency.
- Consider obtaining a restraining order to protect yourself.

“We believe that when people learn about victims who’ve had the strength to come forward and reach out for help it encourages others to do the same.”

*Laura MacLean Brown, Chair, Perth County Elder Abuse Committee and
Education & Family Support Coordinator, Alzheimer Society of Perth County*

For seniors living in a nursing home or other kind of assisted living facility:

- Tell someone what is happening to you.
- Ask others for help if you need it. Staff members have a responsibility to see that abuse stops and that you get the help you need.
- If someone is hurting or threatening you, or if it is not safe for you where you are, call the police.



“I think we’re in a very good position to help educate seniors on the important subject of elder abuse because of our membership and the number of seniors we come in contact with. We could help distribute brochures or other printed material, for example, during our bus trips, without having to single anyone out.”

Steve Kropf, President, Lakeside Seniors Association which has 700 members in Stratford and outlying areas

For anyone who may suspect elder abuse:

The Waterloo Region Committee on Elder Abuse suggests there are three key questions to ask in determining a course of action:

Is this an emergency? (Is the person’s safety, health or wellbeing in imminent danger?)

Does the elderly person have the mental capacity to understand his/her choices and appreciate the consequences? (If not, intervention may be required.)

Is the elderly person ready to act? (A mentally competent adult may choose to stay in an abusive situation in which case support and/or assistance may be the only alternative.)

“Most people working in long-term care are there because they choose to be. They love the elderly. Even though abuse in long-term care facilities is not that common, it is something we all have to be aware of.”

Tracy Richardson, registered nurse working in long-term care



Seniors' services in Perth County

“The elderly in our community need to know it's okay to ask for help. Too often they're too nervous or they don't want to bother the police; they don't even know if what's happening to them is a crime. They don't realize there are other organizations they can turn to for help – and which would put them in contact with the police if need be.”

Laura MacLean Brown, Chair, Perth County Elder Abuse Committee and Education & Family Support Coordinator, Alzheimer Society of Perth County

There are a number of organizations in Perth County that can help if elder abuse is suspected or a senior is at risk. Services range from finding alternative living arrangements, to providing respite care, to offering support during legal proceedings to providing an opportunity for fellowship. The following are brief descriptions of available services.

Alzheimer's Society Perth County advocates and promotes the development of support services, education and research for those affected by Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, including their caregivers. The organization can provide help when caregiver burn-out becomes a concern. (Tel: 519-271-1910 or 1-888-797-1882)

Department of Social Services, City of Stratford, County of Perth and the Town of St. Marys manages 663 rent-geared-to-income units. Victims of domestic violence have priority placement on the waiting list. (Tel: 519-271-3773)

Emily Murphy Centre provides safe and secure transitional housing for abused women, as well as counselling, advocacy and safety planning. (Tel: 519-273-7350 or 1-888-826-8117)
Family Services Perth Huron operates a Family Counselling Program which can provide support and education to families about the rights of seniors and what constitutes abuse. (Tel: 519-273-1020 or 1-800-268-0903)

Lakeside Seniors Association operates out of the Kiwanis Community Centre in Stratford, providing a healthy and friendly environment for seniors to participate in social and leisure activities, entertainment, travel, and an opportunity to find companionship and peer support. (Small annual fee.) (Tel: 519-271-4310)

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Action Line is for residents of long-term care homes to report any concerns they have about their care and the services provided by the long-term care home. It is also for home care clients, family and friends to report any concerns or complaints they might have about home care services and/or their Community Care Access Centre. (Tel: 1-866-434-0144.)



Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to raising awareness about the abuse and neglect of older adults. Their mission is to create an Ontario that is free from abuse for all seniors, through education, training, collaboration, service coordination and advocacy. (Tel: 1-866-299-1011)

Optimism Place can provide a safe and secure place to live for up to eight weeks for abused women and their children. (Crisis Line: 519-271-5550, toll free line: 1-800-265-8598, business line: 519-271-5310)

Perth County OPP investigates allegations of criminal offences in Perth County involving elder abuse and/or refers people to appropriate local resources. (Tel: 519-393-6123)

South West Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) is a non-profit corporation that provides a single point of access to connect people with care in their community. Services include case management, nursing, homemaking, personal support, therapy, social work, the Advanced Home Care Team (NPs), information about and referral to all community services, as well as placement into long term care and other destinations. The CCAC works with clients and other health partners to develop plans of care to meet each individual's needs. In 2008/2009 over half the 3,803 individual clients served in Perth County were 65 and older. (Tel: 519-273-2222 or 1-800-269-3683)

Stratford Police Services will investigate allegations of criminal offences against seniors in Stratford and/or refer people to appropriate agencies that can offer support, such as a legal clinic where the family and the victim can learn more about their rights under power of attorney. (Tel: 519-271-4147)

Victim Services Perth County offers immediate crisis support 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any situation where there's a victim. They take calls from victims as well as concerned friends and/or family members. (Tel: 519-271-9998 or 1-866-387-7773)

Victim/Witness Assistance Program provides information, assistance and support for victims of violent crime once criminal charges have been laid. (Tel: 519-271-5221 or toll free at 1-888-915-1400)

VON Perth-Huron offers respite care to help reduce the stress of caregivers. (Tel: 519-271-7991 or 1-800-265-5176.)

211 Service in Huron and Perth counties will provide information on social and community services in Perth County beginning in April 2010.



Tackling elder abuse in Perth County is a challenge that must become a community priority if it's going to be successful. Police, local service providers, governments and the general public must work together to find solutions to this hidden crime.

“It’s got to start with the community. The community has to address elder abuse the same way it tackled child abuse and spousal abuse. It’s one of the last hidden crimes and that has to change.”

Anita Cole, Regional Client Services Manger, South West CCAC

Recommendations

- 1) That an elder abuse education campaign be launched in partnership with local service providers, targeting the general public, seniors, caregivers and organizations serving seniors and families.
- 2) That consideration be given to establishing a Perth County Elder Abuse Response team, mirroring the approach Waterloo-Wellington has taken.
- 3) A stakeholders meeting be convened in spring of 2010 to discuss a planned course of action and to evaluate progress on recommendations.



Acknowledgements/Sources

Alzheimer's Society Perth County
Department of Social Services, Stratford, Perth County, St. Marys
Emily Murphy Centre
Family Services Perth Huron
Hillside Manor
Lakeside Seniors Association
Optimism Place
Perth County Elder Abuse Committee
Perth County OPP
Senior Service Committee of Perth County
Seniors Mental Health Program, Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance
Southwest Community Care Access Centre
Stratford Police Services
Victim Services Perth County
Victim/Witness Assistance Program
VON Perth-Huron
Waterloo Regional Police Service

Bill of Rights for People who live in Ontario Long-Term Care Homes
www.cleo.on.ca/english/pub/onpub/PDF/seniors/everyres.pdf

Canada's Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity, Special Senate Committee on Aging
Canadian Mental Health Association
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Elder Abuse: What You Need to Know, Waterloo Regional Committee on Elder Abuse
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Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration
Missing Voices: Views of Older Persons on Elder Abuse, World Health Organization
National Clearing House on Family Violence
Report: Awareness and Perceptions of Canadians toward Elder Abuse
Report of the National Seniors Council on Elder Abuse
Reach for Safety: A Safety Guide for Older & Vulnerable Persons, County of Huron
Seniors Canada
Statistics Canada
The Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse





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